



INQUIRY INTO THE VICTORIAN
GOVERNMENT'S COVID-19
CONTACT TRACING SYSTEM AND
TESTING REGIME
Victorian Government Response

OFFICIAL

Contents

Victorian Government Response	2
Acknowledgements	2
Context	2
Introduction.....	3
Victorian Government response to the findings and recommendations	3
Continuing to innovate our approaches	4
Modernising our systems	9
Engaging with our essential partners.....	11
Localising our public health network.....	15
Accounting for our decisions.....	17

Victorian Government Response

Acknowledgements

The Victorian Government thanks the Legal and Social Issues Committee of Parliament for their report.

The Government acknowledges the work of the Committee Chair, Fiona Patten, and Committee members: Dr Tien Kieu, the Hon. Jane Garrett, the Hon. Wendy Lovell, Tania Maxwell, Craig Ondarchie, Kaushaliya Vaghela, Dr Matthew Bach, Rodney Barton, Melina Bath, Georgie Crozier, Dr Catherine Cumming, Enver Erdogan, Hon Edward O'Donohue, Stuart Grimley, David Limbrick, Harriet Shing, Lee Tarlamis, Tim Quilty, Dr Samantha Ratnam, and Sheena Watt.

The Government thanks the secretariat team supporting the Inquiry.

Context

The global COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the Government and systems in an unprecedented way throughout 2020.

Victoria experienced its first confirmed positive COVID-19 case on 25 January 2020. The Victorian Government declared a four-week State of Emergency on 16 March 2020 to give the Victorian health system the best chance of containing the spread of COVID-19. Stage 3 restrictions came into place on 30 March 2020, marking the beginning of Victoria's first wave. Victoria returned to COVIDSafe settings from 27 May 2020.

Following a rapid rise in case numbers in June 2020, Victoria entered its second wave and Stage 3 restrictions came into place on 8 July 2020. These restrictions were lifted on 22 November 2020. After 139 days of increasing positive case numbers, Victoria experienced its first day with zero cases on 26 October 2020.

The Victorian Government's COVID-19 response consisted of a comprehensive state-wide strategy to contain the spread of COVID-19. Contact tracing and testing were two critical components of Victoria's approach.

On 28 October 2020, the Legal and Social Issues Committee (the Committee) was given the Inquiry into the Victorian Government's COVID-19 contact tracing system and testing regime (the Inquiry). The Inquiry was commissioned by the Legislative Council.

The Committee's goal during the Inquiry was to understand Victoria's current position in relation to the capacity and fitness for purpose of its contact tracing system and testing regime.

The report was tabled out of session on 14 December 2020.

Introduction

The Government is keenly aware of the impact the COVID-19 response has had on individuals, communities, the economy, and the public health system. At the height of the second wave in 2020, Victoria experienced much higher rates of community transmission with unknown acquisition sources than any other Australian jurisdiction. Victoria effectively eliminated COVID-19 from the community through contact tracing, testing and public health restrictions. This success was made possible by the cooperation and compliance of Victorians.

The Inquiry was conducted to ensure that Victoria's contact tracing and testing regime is of the highest possible standard to minimise public health risks to the Victorian public.

The Victorian Government supports all recommendations in full or in principle from the Inquiry.

The Government's response to the Inquiry is committed to protecting Victorians from COVID-19 outbreaks. Based on expert public health advice and learnings obtained throughout the pandemic, the Government endeavours to stop transmission early through a 'go hard and go early' approach. This approach aims to avoid future lockdowns and escalations in case numbers.

Victoria recognised the need for a localised approach during the pandemic and acted swiftly by investing over \$80 million to establish Local Public Health Units (LPHUs). LPHUs support local responses that can scale quickly and better support those most in need.

The Government response to date has relied on working collectively with experts, partners, and the local community. The Government acknowledges that the contributions made by Victorians has been central to this approach.

The Inquiry has provided a forum for necessary scrutiny to ensure best practice of Victoria's contact tracing system and testing regime. The Inquiry's aim is to support protecting Victorians against future outbreaks and minimise the negative social and economic impacts of containing them. This will inform how the Government continues to innovate and improve its approach to contact tracing and testing, engages with essential partners, localises the public health network and is accountable and transparent in its approach.

Victorian Government response to the findings and recommendations

The Inquiry detailed 47 findings and made 19 recommendations relating to Victoria's contact tracing processes and testing regime.

The Victorian Government supports all recommendations in full or in principle. The following response is provided in relation to all recommendations and findings from the Inquiry.

The response addresses each recommendation under five themes:

- Continuing to innovate our approaches
- Modernising our systems
- Engaging with our essential partners

- Localising our public health network
- Accounting for our decisions

Attachment 1 shows how each recommendation maps to these themes.

Continuing to innovate our approaches

Key observations from the Inquiry

The Inquiry found that the Victorian Government has implemented a comprehensive testing strategy as part of its testing regime. Further, the Government has developed alternative testing modalities including at-home testing, rapid response testing, surveillance testing, asymptomatic testing, and wastewater testing.

The Inquiry identified that a multi-tiered approach is imperative for a robust COVID-19 response. Both metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria should receive significant coverage of testing sites. Surveillance testing methods should consist of wastewater surveillance testing and asymptomatic surveillance testing. These are important tools for an enhanced testing regime.

The Inquiry also found that the following indicators can be used to measure the capacity of our contact tracing system:

- the system can manage four new cases per day per million population
- the system should be extreme stress tested at ten times the number (40 new cases per day per million population)
- notification of COVID-19 positive patients should be within 24 hours from test collection
- notification of close contacts should be within 48 hours for 90 per cent of cases to ensure they are quarantining within 48 hours of being exposed to a COVID-19 positive individual.

Recommendations

Six recommendations of the Inquiry related to continuous innovation (refer to **Attachment 1**).

Continuous innovation of contact tracing and testing approaches is critical to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of future COVID-19 response strategies.

The recommendations relating to continuous innovation include:

2. That the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee examine the following issues in depth during their inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic response:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wrap-around services that could be implemented to support individuals who are unable to isolate in a hotel setting because of health reasons • the cost effectiveness of the contact tracing system and testing regime including examining ongoing contracts and their efficacy • the impact of restrictions that have been implemented, including determining if their benefits have outweighed the social; physical and psychological health; and economic outcomes.
4. Asymptomatic testing should continue to be voluntary for all Victorians
5. Pending further research into its validity, the Victorian Government should continue to incorporate wastewater testing into an ongoing disease surveillance program
6. The Committee encourages further research into and development of saliva testing technology and other non-invasive, quick turn-around technologies, for wider roll out in industry and time-critical situations
8. That the Victorian Government is guided by the following indicators in relation to the ongoing development of their testing regime so that Victorians can be confident that the regime has capacity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easily accessible and reliable tests with clear criteria for getting tested • tests are accurately recorded, and results are received by the patient within 24 hours • surge workforce is available at short notice • multiple testing strategies can be deployed (fixed, rapid response, mobile units).
9. That the Victorian Government be guided by the following indicators in relation to the ongoing development of a contact tracing system so that Victorians can be confident that it is fit for purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitates multilingual communications through in-language resources • cost-effectiveness • technology captures nuances for each case and contact (number of persons per household, language, quarantine stage, time since test and more) • risk-based prioritisation during super surges capacity to analyse data and identify links.

Government response and actions

The Victorian Government supports recommendations 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 in full and recommendation 2 in principle.

The Victorian Government is committed to the following actions to address each recommendation of the Inquiry.

Recommendation 2. That the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee examine the following issues in depth during their inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic response:

- *wrap-around services that could be implemented to support individuals who are unable to isolate in a hotel setting because of health reasons*

- *the cost effectiveness of the contact tracing system and testing regime including examining ongoing contracts and their efficacy*
- *the impact of restrictions that have been implemented, including determining if their benefits have outweighed the social; physical and psychological health; and economic outcomes.*

The Government supports this recommendation in principle, noting that the 2020-21 Budget Estimates Inquiry hearings were held by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) during the third round of COVID-19 Inquiry hearings in November and December 2020.

The Government offers wrap-around services for individuals unable to isolate in hotel settings. The Government also offers free emergency accommodation for individuals that are unable to isolate in their homes (e.g. spacing requirements, safety issues).

Recommendation 4. Asymptomatic testing should continue to be voluntary for all Victorians

The Victorian Government understands that asymptomatic testing is an important tool for an enhanced testing regime. The Government supports access to testing for all Victorians as part of its overarching comprehensive testing strategy.

As part of the Government's comprehensive testing strategy, the Department of Health established an asymptomatic surveillance testing program across key industries. Under the Workplace Additional Industry Obligations (WAIOD), where an employer's Work Premises is an industry listed under the Surveillance Testing Industry List and Requirements, the employer must carry out surveillance testing for COVID-19 on its workers. The list of industries includes ports of entry, Covid-19 Quarantine Victoria (CVQ), and hospitals.

Separate to this list, there are industries in which surveillance testing is recommended and not mandated. These include meat, poultry and seafood processing, supermarkets, and aged care.

The Government will continue to address the asymptomatic surveillance testing program in consultation across government and to support the range of testing strategies being implemented as part of its COVID-19 response.

Recommendation 5. Pending further research into its validity, the Victorian Government should continue to incorporate wastewater testing into an ongoing disease surveillance program

The Victorian Government has invested significantly in a world class wastewater surveillance program as part of its ongoing disease surveillance program.

The Government realised the importance of wastewater surveillance in February 2020. At the time no test method was available for the detection of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater.

Working with Water Research Australia, the Government helped initiate the collaboration on Sewage Surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 project bringing together engineering, microbiology and epidemiology expertise from health departments, water utilities, laboratories, and researchers. From initial sample collection in April, rapid methods development and validation, a reliable wastewater test method for SARS-CoV-2 was operational in August 2020.

The Government will continue its wastewater surveillance programs to support its ongoing disease programs and ensure research supports its validity so that resources are properly allocated.

Recommendation 6. The Committee encourages further research into and development of saliva testing technology and other non-invasive, quick turn-around technologies, for wider roll out in industry and time-critical situations

The Victorian Government is committed to ongoing research into non-invasive, quick-turn-around testing technologies. Alternative testing modalities have been piloted and implemented in response to the pandemic. These include saliva testing and antigen and rapid molecular testing. Saliva testing has been implemented since December 2020 for repeat frequent asymptomatic screening of high-risk workforces. Planning is underway for restricted implementation of antigen and rapid molecular testing.

The Government will continue to investigate and adopt appropriate testing technologies.

Recommendation 8. That the Victorian Government is guided by the following indicators in relation to the ongoing development of their testing regime so that Victorians can be confident that the regime has capacity:

- *easily accessible and reliable tests with clear criteria for getting tested*
- *tests are accurately recorded, and results are received by the patient within 24 hours*
- *surge workforce is available at short notice*
- *multiple testing strategies can be deployed (fixed, rapid response, mobile units).*

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that their testing regime continues to adapt and evolve based on advice regarding best practice models from the World Health Organisation.

The Department has rigorous routines to examine performance metrics and inform operational adjustments. These routines are continually monitored and evaluated for optimisation purposes.

Testing is undertaken subject to strict accreditation requirements from the National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia to ensure tests and results are accurately recorded.

The Victorian Government acknowledges the importance of having fixed testing sites within proximity to all areas within metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. The Government has invested in an extensive network of approximately 180 testing sites across Victoria, including fixed, drive-through, walk-through, roving, mobile and pop-up COVID-19 testing sites.

Recommendation 9. That the Victorian Government be guided by the following indicators in relation to the ongoing development of a contact tracing system so that Victorians can be confident that it is fit for purpose:

- *facilitates multilingual communications through in-language resources*
- *cost-effectiveness*

- *technology captures nuances for each case and contact (number of persons per household, language, quarantine stage, time since test and more)*

The Victorian Government welcomes ongoing partnerships with Local Government, local schools, local community leaders, ethnic community radios, faith groups and youth networks to assist with translated materials and resources dedicated to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and priority communities.

To further support community engagement and rapid contact tracing; the Department of Health and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, supported by the CALD Communities Taskforce have also:

- translated COVID-19 communications materials into 57 languages
- produced audio and video in-language animations using simple language and recorded in 18 languages
- funded a daily broadcast multilingual news service in priority languages, delivered across 15 community radio stations reaching approximately 350,000 people each week
- developed a cultural observances campaign strategy, to ensure Victorians continue to understand and observe restrictions around significant cultural and faith events
- provided regular briefings to the multicultural sector on the latest COVID-19 information, supporting community and faith leaders to address questions, misinformation and concerns in their communities
- established a WhatsApp Community Leaders group with over 150 members to help disseminate critical COVID-19 related information to communities in a timely manner
- invested in local partnerships to work across six of the most diverse local government areas, to undertake targeted engagement and communications activities, including working with health providers, service providers, local bicultural workers, community health champions and community groups to improve understanding of COVIDSafe behaviours and access to supports, and promote testing
- provided significant funding to local community organisations and services to directly support their communities to isolate and stay safe, including through provision of emergency relief, outreach supports, and development of local communications and messaging
- funded more than 900 multicultural seniors organisations to support their communities during the pandemic
- proactive outreach to relevant community and faith leaders at the onset of outbreaks to engage the community
- developed tailored responses for high-risk groups, including temporary migrants, international students and migrant workers, including activation of a new approach for the targeted testing of international students

- bicultural workers and Rapid Response Community Engagement Teams (RRCETS) deployed to fixed and pop up testing sites to provide information and support.

Further, indicators such as those highlighted in this recommendation are used in reporting mechanisms to better inform our response to outbreaks. This ensures we are targeting the right cohorts and effectively catering our messaging and testing responses.

The Victorian Government looks forward to continued collaboration with its partners to support ongoing development of its contact tracing system.

Modernising our systems

Key observations from the Inquiry

The Inquiry found that Victoria is well placed to continue to provide accessible testing. The redeveloped contact tracing system demonstrates that the Government responded to lessons learnt throughout the pandemic. The Victorian Government has also increased its capacity to manage a greater number of tests within the recommended timeframe between samples being taken and results being received. The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system has been a highly effective measure to facilitate rapid contact tracing, and appropriate data capture systems are being rolled out throughout the state.

The Inquiry identified the multiple opportunities for improvement, noting that the use of manual data entry processes at the beginning of the pandemic had been ineffective for dealing with escalations in case numbers. The Government’s engagement of IBM as an analytics platform and delay in rolling out digital data capturing systems, including a digital test tracking system, hindered its ability to deal with spikes in case numbers during the peak of the second wave. The Inquiry recommended that Data Exchange is required to assist with effective contact tracing between jurisdictions to manage future outbreaks.

Recommendations

Three recommendations of the Inquiry related to modernising current systems (refer to **Attachment 1**).

Modernising the Government’s digital contact tracing and testing systems is crucial to its ability to rapidly deal with escalations in case numbers.

The recommendations relating to modernising systems include:

7. That the Victorian Government participate in the development, establishment and use of a national contact tracing Data Exchange as recommended by the National Contact Tracing Review
10. That the Victorian Government conduct modelling studies on its digital contact tracing system to better understand its expected and potential capacity. The results of these studies should be made public
15. That the Victorian Government mandate the use of Test Tracker for all test sites and develop real-time reporting between Test Tracker and the appropriate databases

Government response and actions

The Victorian Government supports recommendations 7 and 10 in full. Recommendation 15 relating to mandating the use of Test Tracker is supported in principle. The Government supports implementing Test Tracker with as many testing sites and pathology laboratories as technically and clinically feasible. However, the Government needs to consult industry bodies, including health services and pathology providers, on where it can be implemented and adopted. Health services and pathology providers utilise a complex set of embedded information systems, including legacy systems. In some instances, integration with Test Tracker may not be technically feasible. The Government is investigating other information solutions that can reduce manual handling and support real time reporting in these circumstances.

The Victorian Government is committed to the following actions to address each recommendation of the Inquiry.

Recommendation 7. That the Victorian Government participate in the development, establishment and use of a national contact tracing Data Exchange as recommended by the National Contact Tracing Review

The Victorian Government supports utilisation of a national contact tracing Data Exchange to support rapid contact tracing and as a means of keeping borders open whilst ensuring Victorians are safe.

The Government is playing an active role in the Commonwealth Government's establishment of a national contact tracing Data Exchange. The national Data Exchange will facilitate the exchange of data between state and territory contact tracing systems to allow contact tracing teams to search, request, share and transfer case and contact tracing data.

Recommendation 10. That the Victorian Government conduct modelling studies on its digital contact tracing system to better understand its expected and potential capacity. The results of these studies should be made public

The Victorian Government recognises that enhanced digital technologies are a key feature of a robust contact tracing system and testing regime. Following the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Victorian Government has embarked on end-to-end enhancements to the technologies that underpin efficient and effective contact tracing.

These enhancements include:

- Digital Testing Program (including Test Tracker and data collection)
- Improvements to the Public Health Event Surveillance System (PHESS)
- Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) platform on Salesforce software
- Victorian Government Quick Response (QR) Code Service (digital visitor registration)

The Government's new CRM platform was built to accelerate the contact tracing process across testing, positive case interview, identification of close and secondary contacts and their isolation or quarantine. The Salesforce CRM platform went live on 22 October 2020, further enhancements to CRM features and capabilities were released in December 2020.

The Government stores and manages all data in accordance with the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and *Health Records Act 2001* and Victorian Protected Data Security Standards. The Government stores data in the cloud in accordance with the *Australian Privacy Principles and the Health Privacy Act 1988* (Commonwealth).

Through these improvements, the Government has been able to firmly establish and monitor key performance indicators of its digital systems. These include test turnaround times, the number of COVID-19 positive individuals who are isolating at the time of their symptoms, and the percentage of close contacts who are identified and told to isolate within a forty-eight hour period.

Recommendation 15. That the Victorian Government mandate the use of Test Tracker for all test sites and develop real-time reporting between Test Tracker and the appropriate databases

The Victorian Government supports implementing Test Tracker with as many testing sites and pathology laboratories as technically and clinically feasible.

To date, Test Tracker has processed close to over 740,000 tests with approximately 8,000 – 10,000 tests being processed each day. Test Tracker covers an estimated 50 per cent of the testing network, including most of the hotel quarantine staff testing. The Government captures all other testing data via standard data collection processes that exist across the Health Service and Pathology system.

The Government will continue to roll out use of Test Tracker over the coming months to further improve the quality of testing data. The Victorian Government is also dedicated to further modelling and analysis to identify thresholds for further expanding its contact tracing and outbreak management systems.

Engaging with our essential partners

Key observations from the Inquiry

The Inquiry found that the Victorian Government has established CALD Communities Task Force, which includes multicultural and multifaith leaders. This task force has been a critical part of the contact tracing efforts in outbreaks such as the Northern Metro outbreak.

The Inquiry identified opportunities for improvement stating that the contact tracing system must include diverse processes for all cohorts. Communication, engagement and information about isolation processes and contact tracing are critical factors that must be embedded within effective contact tracing management. The Inquiry found a lack of clear and accessible guidance for businesses meant that some small eligible businesses were unaware of their legislative obligations to assist with contact tracing. Additionally, inconsistencies in testing criteria from federal and state governments was an obstacle to Victorians accessing testing and can prevent health providers delivering testing services.

Engaging with trusted community representatives is key to preventing widespread transmission in vulnerable communities. Community leaders, including General Practitioners (GPs), can assist with ensuring their communities understand the process of COVID-19 contact tracing and testing. The Inquiry stated that GPs must be incorporated in the developing and supporting of the official crisis response.

Recommendations

Five recommendations of the Inquiry related to engagement with partners (refer to **Attachment 1**).

Effective community engagement is essential to building a contact tracing system and testing regime that is accessible to all Victorians.

The recommendations relating to engagement include:

3. That the Victorian Government ensure that Victoria's testing regime includes diverse processes for different cohorts and testing sites have good territorial reach
14. That the Victorian Government engage in further consultation with other jurisdictions to ensure consistency of testing criteria
17. That the Victorian Government, through the Chief Medical Officer embed General Practitioners into the system of management of contact tracing and testing as part of a localised, collaborative and more person-centred approach
18. That the Victorian Government's CALD Communities Task Force include health workers such as General Practitioners
19. That the Victorian Government work with unions, industry groups and associations to develop clear and accessible guidance for businesses on their obligations for contact tracing record keeping, particularly around setting up and using digital systems such as QR codes. Involve communication experts early and throughout

Government response and actions

The Victorian Government supports recommendations 3, 14 and 19 in full. Recommendation 17 relating to embedding GPs into the contact tracing and testing system's management structure through the Chief Medical Officer is supported in principle. GPs already play a vital and valuable role in the Government response to COVID-19 as outlined below. Recommendation 18 relating to inclusion of health workers such as General Practitioners in the CALD Communities Task Force is also supported in principle.

The Victorian Government is committed to the following actions to address each recommendation of the Inquiry.

Recommendation 3. That the Victorian Government ensure that Victoria's testing regime includes diverse processes for different cohorts and testing sites have good territorial reach

The Victorian Government welcomes working in partnership with Local Government and the community to ensure its testing regime includes diverse processes to allow for effective engagement and communication with different cohorts.

Throughout the peak of the second wave, the Victorian Government partnered with Local Governments, local schools, local community leaders, faith groups and youth networks to assist with translated materials and the delivery of public health messaging.

These partnerships achieved the following key actions:

- translating COVID-19 communications materials into 57 languages
- producing audio and video in-language animations recorded in 18 languages
- funding of a daily broadcast multilingual news service in priority languages, delivered across 15 community radio stations reaching approximately 350,000 people each week
- significant funding of local community organisations and services to directly support their communities to isolate and stay safe, including provision of emergency relief, outreach supports, and development of local communications and messaging
- proactively reaching out to relevant community and faith leaders at the onset of outbreaks to facilitate engagement with communities
- deploying bicultural workers and RRCETS to fixed and pop up testing sites to provide information and support.

The Government also takes an evidence-based approach to assess its success of local community and diverse engagement programs. Regular reviews of activities are undertaken to ensure engagement and testing objectives are achieved.

Recommendation 14. That the Victorian Government engage in further consultation with other jurisdictions to ensure consistency of testing criteria

The Victorian Government welcomes further consultation and collaboration with other jurisdictions to ensure testing criteria is consistent across the board.

The Commonwealth Government has developed the Series of National Guidelines (SoNGs) in consultation with the Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA), which has been endorsed by the Australian Health Protection Principle Committee. The CDNA has Victorian representation and is engaged in this work to develop national recommendations. Victoria subsequently follow the recommendations. The SoNGs summarise recommendations for surveillance, infection control, laboratory testing and contact management for COVID-19.

The Victorian Government has also seen considerable improvements to testing processes and coordination through interjurisdictional collaboration. This includes improved geocoding of locations to enable daily reporting of cases notified to Public Health that are of relevance elsewhere in the Government, such as public housing.

In partnership with pathology laboratory providers, The Victorian Government has also invested significantly in expanding the capacity of the pathology system. This investment has seen improvements in strengthening the surge capability and reducing turnaround times to respond to increased demands for testing. The public pathology testing capacity is now more than triple what it was in October 2020.

Recommendation 17. That the Victorian Government, through the Chief Medical Officer embed general practitioners into the system of management of contact tracing and testing as part of a localised, collaborative and more person-centred approach

The Victorian Government welcomes engaging with GPs and Public Health Nurses (PHNs) to determine the roles that GPs are best placed to fulfil in the COVID response.

Throughout the pandemic, the Victorian Government consulted with GPs, the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and Victorian Public Health Networks to develop an overarching COVID-19 GP model of care.

The Government recognises that GPs are essential to case management and perform a critical role in the public health response. They are the key clinical care providers for COVID-19 positive individuals through the COVID positive pathways program.

The Victorian Government welcomes ongoing collaboration with GPs and PHNs to formalise their role in testing, case management and the vaccination strategy.

Recommendation 18. That the Victorian Government's CALD Community Task Force include health workers such as General Practitioners

The Victorian Government supports the inclusion of health workers in the Victorian Government response to the COVID-19 pandemic and welcomes the opportunity to work closely with CALD communities.

The Victorian Government has established a CALD Health Advisory Panel which includes GPs and members of the CALD Communities Taskforce (government department representatives). The Taskforce works closely in partnership with the CALD Health Advisory Panel. The CALD Health Advisory Panel provides monthly updates directly to the CALD Communities Taskforce, to ensure that the views and expertise of CALD health workers are embedded within the work of the CALD Communities Taskforce.

The Government will continue to work closely with the CALD Health Advisory Panel to ensure their contact tracing system and testing regime is effective for all Victorians.

Using the CALD Urgent Response Brokerage Fund, the Government will soon offer formal Emergency Management training to CALD community leaders to enable more seamless collaboration between the Department and CALD communities during outbreaks.

The Department also funds grassroots community organisations to work collaboratively with COVID-19 response teams during an outbreak to support delivery of translated and targeted communications.

The Family Recovery Program, also supported by the CALD Urgent Response Brokerage Fund, provides longer term support to families and households who are impacted by COVID-19. The Government offers recovery options including training, housing, childcare, health care and mental health supports.

Recommendation 19. That the Victorian Government work with unions, industry groups and associations to develop clear and accessible guidance for businesses on their obligations for contact tracing record keeping, particularly around setting up and using digital systems such as QR codes. Involve communication experts early and throughout

The Victorian Government recognises that strong engagement with unions, industry groups and associations to create clear and accessible guidance for businesses is essential for an effective and efficient contact tracing system and testing regime.

The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) has established the Industry Coordination and Recovery Group to work closely with unions, industry groups and associations to provide high quality guidance to businesses on COVIDSafe operations. The Group engages with unions, industry groups and associations across a variety of channels to provide advice to the Department of Health public health teams on industry impacts. It also supports unions, industry groups and associations to understand public health directions, helping businesses to implement and comply with COVIDSafe requirements.

From 28 May, all venues and businesses required to undertake electronic record keeping must use the Victorian Government QR Code Service through the Service Victoria app. This is convenient for Victorians and gives contact tracers access to the best data quickly.

The Victorian Government looks forward to ongoing engagement with Local Governments, businesses, and the community to support the ongoing development of its contact tracing system and testing regime.

Localising our public health network

Key observations from the Inquiry

The Inquiry found that the Victorian Government has adopted an end-to-end automated process for enabling and recording contact tracing and testing results in response to learnings from the second wave.

The Inquiry identified that Victoria's highly centralised healthcare system was unable to tailor effective responses for regional cases, which contributed to confusion and contact tracing delays. Scalability is a key measure in an adaptable and fit for purpose contact tracing and testing system. The Inquiry also found that assessing the capacity and effectiveness of contact tracing was difficult during the hearings given the system had recently been redeveloped and some functions were yet to be rolled out.

Recommendations

Three recommendations of the Inquiry related to localising Victoria's public health network.

Local expertise is an indispensable tool for establishing an efficient contact tracing system and testing regime. Localised public health networks ensure that workforces have the necessary scalability and surge capacity to provide tailored responses to communities in the event of an outbreak.

The recommendations relating to localising the public health network include:

1. That the Government engage with the evidence from the experience of the pandemic that our public health system requires review, testing and enhancement and a more decentralised, community-based

approach to fulfil its function of identifying and preventing or minimising public health risks to the community
11. That the Victorian Government establish a trained reserve workforce for future public health emergencies
12. That the Victorian Government increase the number of staff in the Department of Health and Human Service's public health units and contact tracing teams so that it is in line with current recommendations

Government response and actions

The Victorian Government supports recommendations 1, 11 and 12 in full.

The Victorian Government is committed to the following actions to address each recommendation of the Inquiry.

Recommendation 1. That the Government engage with the evidence from the experience of the pandemic that our public health system requires review, testing and enhancement and a more decentralised, community-based approach to fulfil its function of identifying and preventing or minimising public health risks to the community

The Victorian Government recognises the value of localising its public health model. The Government believes that a more localised approach helps to better deal with COVID outbreaks.

In July 2020, the Victorian Government established twelve LPHUs responsible for local case support and outbreak management. The LPHU network now operates across regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne to deliver contact tracing close to communities where there are COVID-19 positive individuals. They also provide a surge-ready workforce able to manage any increase in infection numbers. These units are located within local communities and utilise local partnerships to deliver tailored contact tracing and outbreak management in communities where there is an active outbreak. LPHUs are supported with policy, strategy and coordination services from the Department of Health.

The Victorian Government is continuing to support and embed LPHUs in local communities, working jointly with health services.

Recommendation 11. That the Victorian Government establish a trained reserve workforce for future public health emergencies

The Victorian Government supports the establishment of a trained reserve workforce for future public health emergencies as part of a whole-of-Victorian-Government response.

As the COVID-19 emergency recedes, further workforce planning will be required to ensure the surge workforce is appropriately and effectively resourced moving forward. The Government has also established arrangements across other government agencies, external providers, and health specialists to provide a surge workforce in the event of future waves of COVID-19 transmission.

Recommendation 12. That the Victorian Government increase the number of staff in the Department of Health and Human Service’s public health units and contact tracing teams so that it is in line with current recommendations

Since the delivery of the report of the Inquiry, the Victorian Government has increased the number of staff in LPHUs. The Government is committed to PHUs leading Victoria’s COVID-19 contact tracing and outbreak management response. The LPHU workforce provides surge capacity across the state.

Accounting for our decisions

Key observations from the Inquiry

The Inquiry identified that greater transparency in relation to processes and a willingness from the Victorian Government to take responsibility for decisions would increase public trust and confidence in the capacity of the contact tracing system and testing regime. There was a lack of transparency related to cost-effectiveness of the system.

The Victorian Government acknowledges the importance of accountability for decision-making and the need for transparency to build trust with the community and instil confidence in our contact tracing and testing regime.

Recommendations

Two recommendations of the Inquiry related to accountability of decision-making.

Accountability and transparency are key pillars of trust that underpin the relationship between Government and community.

The recommendations relating to accountability include:

13. That the Victorian Government publish accurate records of financial commitments and costings involved with the testing regime and contact tracing system, including resourcing and staffing by third parties
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16. That the Victorian Government provide evidence to the Victorian public about the basis of its contact tracing and testing response to COVID-19 in relation to operational processes implemented and procurement decisions

Government response and actions

The Victorian Government supports recommendation 16 in full and recommendation 13 in principle.

The Victorian Government is committed to the following actions to address each recommendation of the Inquiry.

Recommendation 13. That the Victorian Government publish accurate records of financial commitments and costings involved with the testing regime and contact tracing system, including resourcing and staffing by third parties

The Victorian Government supports publishing accurate records to maintain transparency and trust with the community.

Multiple processes currently allow for financial scrutiny of Government expenditure, including the PAEC inquiries and processes.

The Government has systems in place to report on structures and workforce. The Government is also undertaking work to enhance workforce reporting systems, including other supporting features such as backend database reconfiguration, whole of department employee lifecycle process and data capture points, and a governance model that will ensure the improved processes and systems remain in place.

Recommendation 16. That the Victorian Government provide evidence to the Victorian public about the basis of its contact tracing and testing response to COVID-19 in relation to operational processes implemented and procurement decisions

The Victorian Government supports publishing accurate financial records.

Departments are required to publish details of all contracts greater than \$100,000 on the Buying for Victoria website. Contracts greater than \$10 million are published in full. Details of procurements during a State of Emergency under the Victorian Government Purchasing Board's (VGPB) Critical Incident Procurement Policy are reported to the VGPB annually.

The Victorian Government is committed to continuing to publish accurate records of their financial commitments. The Government will endeavour to provide more publicly available information on the impact of effective contact tracing and testing to contain community transmission of COVID-19.

OFFICIAL

Attachment 1: Inquiry recommendations and Government policy positions

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
<p>1. That the Government engage with the evidence from the experience of the pandemic that our public health system requires review, testing and enhancement and a more decentralised, community-based approach to fulfil its function of identifying and preventing or minimising public health risks to the community.</p>	<p>Localising public health network</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p> <p>The Government engages an evidence-based approach to continuous improvement. It has learnt from the shortcomings of the current public health system. In response, it has adopted a community-based public health model and embarked on a localisation process.</p> <p>This localisation process commenced from July 2020 with twelve LPHUs responsible for local case support and outbreak management. These units are embedded within local communities and able to utilise local partnerships and expertise.</p> <p>The Department of Health shares learnings across all units to ensure a coordinated approach. This enables better identification, prevention and minimisation of public health risks to the Victorian community. The Government is continuing to expand its localisation process and support rollout of LPHUs in 2021.</p> <p>The Government acknowledges that there was limited evidence available at the beginning of the second wave to help inform its targeted testing strategies. Learning from its experience, the Government has since established the Digital Testing Program to better capture and understand which cohorts and communities are presenting for testing and modify its response accordingly.</p> <p>These actions allow for increasingly rapid responses in identifying and responding to cases of COVID-19.</p>
<p>2. That the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee examine the following issues in depth during their inquiry into the COVID-19 pandemic response:</p>	<p>Continuously innovate</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in principle.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government supports this recommendation in principle, noting that the 2020-21 Budget Estimates Inquiry hearings were held by</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap-around services that could be implemented to support individuals who are unable to isolate in a hotel setting because of health reasons. • The cost effectiveness of the contact tracing system and testing regime including examining ongoing contracts and their efficacy. • The impact of restrictions that have been implemented, including determining if their benefits have outweighed the social; physical and psychological health; and economic outcomes. 		<p>the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) during the third round of COVID-19 Inquiry hearings in November and December 2020.</p> <p>The Government supports a multi-tiered approach to responding to COVID-19. The Government is committed to learning from experience to managing future COVID-19 outbreaks that minimises the impact on social; physical and psychological health; and economic outcomes.</p> <p>The Government is actively engaged in supporting the state to recover from the actions to date and has introduced support in following current requirements.</p> <p>The Government offers wrap-around services for individuals unable to isolate in hotel settings. These individuals and their families are assigned dedicated case managers that act as a single point of contact. The Government also offers free emergency accommodation for individuals that are unable to isolate in their homes (e.g. spacing requirements, safety issues).</p>
<p>3. That the Victorian Government ensure that Victoria’s testing regime includes diverse processes for different cohorts and testing sites have good territorial reach</p>	<p>Engagement with partners</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government welcomes working in partnership with Local Government and the community to ensure its testing regime includes diverse processes to allow for effective engagement and communication with different cohorts.</p> <p>To date, the Department of Health has partnered with LPHUs and local community health organisations to assist with on-the-ground testing processes, tracing and household engagement in both rural and metropolitan Victoria.</p> <p>The Department of Health has also partnered with Local Governments, local schools, local community leaders, faith groups and youth networks to assist with translated materials and delivery of public health messaging. The Department has also leveraged these partnerships to connect with and support families.</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<p>Multiple large community meetings to disseminate and gather information have been attended by the Chief Health Officer and Commander of Testing and Community Engagement. The government recognises the importance of community engagement through trusted leaders.</p> <p>The Government also takes an evidence-based approach to assess its success of local community and diverse engagement programs. Regular reviews of activities are undertaken to ensure engagement and testing objectives are achieved.</p> <p>To maintain ease of access to testing, pop-up testing sites have been established with substantial targeted promotions of testing locations.</p> <p>The Victorian Government will continue to test all Victorians. The Government will also continue to expand their testing toolkit in the next six months to ensure it is best-placed to rapidly identify the occurrence of COVID-19 in local communities and implement measures to control to prevent its further spread.</p> <p>The Government will also continue to encourage Victorians with symptoms of COVID-19 to get tested and support them throughout this process.</p>
<p>4. Asymptomatic testing should continue to be voluntary for all Victorians</p>	<p>Continuously innovate</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government understands asymptomatic testing is an important tool for an enhanced testing regime. The Government supports access to testing for all Victorians as part of its overarching comprehensive testing strategy.</p> <p>The pathology system must meet the daily demands associated with symptomatic and outbreak-related testing as an absolute priority.</p> <p>As part of the Government's comprehensive testing strategy, the Department of Health established an asymptomatic surveillance testing program across key industries. Under the Workplace Additional Industry</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<p>Obligations (WAIOD), where an employer’s Work Premises is an industry listed under the Surveillance Testing Industry List and Requirements, the employer must carry out surveillance testing for COVID-19 on its workers. The list of industries includes ports of entry, Covid-19 Quarantine Victoria (CVQ), and hospitals.</p> <p>Separate to this list, there are industries in which surveillance testing is recommended and not mandated. These include meat, poultry and seafood processing, supermarkets, and aged care.</p> <p>The asymptomatic surveillance testing program supports Victoria’s overarching testing strategy, which aims to ensure workplaces are safe with voluntary testing and testing is accessible for all Victorians.</p> <p>The Government acknowledges the importance of having fixed-testing sites within proximity to all areas within metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. There is an extensive network of around 180 testing sites across Victoria, including fixed, drive-through, walk-through, roving, mobile and pop-up COVID-19 testing sites. This testing network operates alongside rapid response testing teams, roving testing squads, rapid community engagement teams, and a call-to-test (at home) testing service for symptomatic individuals who cannot leave their homes.</p> <p>The Government will continue to address the asymptomatic surveillance testing program in consultation across government and to support the range of testing strategies being implemented as part of its COVID-19 response.</p>
<p>5. Pending further research into its validity, the Victorian Government should continue to incorporate wastewater testing into an ongoing disease surveillance program</p>	<p>Continuously innovate</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p> <p>Victoria supports this recommendation and will continue to include wastewater testing into an ongoing disease surveillance program based on evidence-based research.</p> <p>The Government realised the importance of wastewater surveillance in February 2020. At the time no test method was available for the detection of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater.</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<p>Working with Water Research Australia, the Government helped initiate the collaboration on Sewage Surveillance of SARS-CoV-2 project bringing together engineering, microbiology and epidemiology expertise from health departments, water utilities, laboratories and researchers.</p> <p>This work supported the rapid development of analytical methods using new techniques for virus concentration and provided a significant contribution globally to overcome technical challenges related to assay inhibition, validation of clinical assays and interpreting analytical data.</p> <p>From initial sample collection in April, rapid methods development and validation, a reliable wastewater test method for SARS-CoV-2 was operational in August 2020.</p> <p>Wastewater surveillance will continue to support the Victorian COVID-19 response for the early detection of SARS-CoV-2.</p> <p>The Government will continue its wastewater surveillance programs to support its ongoing disease programs (e.g. monitoring polioviruses, noroviruses and adenoviruses) and ensure research supports its validity so that resources are properly allocated.</p>
<p>6. The Committee encourages further research into and development of saliva testing technology and other non-invasive, quick turn-around technologies, for wider roll out in industry and time-critical situations</p>	<p>Continuously innovate</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government supports additional research into saliva testing technology and other non-invasive, quick-turn-around technologies to support surveillance testing.</p> <p>In partnership with the Peter Doherty Institute new testing technologies have been piloted for broader implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • saliva testing – allows for application of Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) technologies with a more acceptable sampling technique, which enables it to be used for repeat, frequent testing. Sensitivity is lower than a ‘gold standard’ oral/nasal PCR test, so repeat, frequent saliva testing is always used alongside regular

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<p>but less frequent oral/nasal PCR testing. Saliva sampling has been implemented since December 2020 for repeat frequent asymptomatic screening of high-risk workforces such as hotel quarantine and airport staff. Ongoing post-implementation validation and evaluation of saliva testing continues as more data become available.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • antigen and rapid molecular testing – provides rapid (10-45 mins) testing capacity outside of a laboratory near point-of-care. Caution is required with use of these tests as their lower sensitivity means a risk of false negative results. They also require an oral/nasal swab so are not acceptable to participants for repeat frequent testing. As antigen only provides an indicative result, confirmatory oral/nasal PCR testing is always required. Planning is underway for restricted implementation with embedded evaluation as a rapid triage tool for high-risk symptomatic cohorts from March 2021. <p>The Government will continue to investigate and adopt appropriate testing technologies. The Doherty Institute is currently conducting an updated horizon scan of emerging testing technologies to assist the Department of Health (the Department) in assessing potential utility and application. The Department is regularly reviewing testing practices and strategies to ensure the best use of resources. Decisions made about COVID-19 testing in Victoria are based on the expert advice of the Chief Health Officer.</p>
<p>7. That the Victorian Government participate in the development, establishment and use of a national contact tracing Data Exchange as recommended by the National Contact Tracing Review.</p>	<p>Modernise systems</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u> The Victorian Government has actively participated in the Commonwealth Government's establishment of a national contact tracing Data Exchange.</p> <p>As of February 2021, the Commonwealth provided a demonstration of the in-development data exchange solution. The Victorian Government has provided feedback and system requirements to the Commonwealth Government.</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
<p>8. That the Victorian Government is guided by the following indicators in relation to the ongoing development of their testing regime so that Victorians can be confident that the regime has capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easily accessible and reliable tests with clear criteria for getting tested • tests are accurately recorded, and results are received by the patient within 24 hours • surge workforce is available at short notice • multiple testing strategies can be deployed (fixed, rapid response, mobile units). 	<p>Continuously innovate</p>	<p>The Victorian Government supports collaboration towards this solution as a means of keeping borders open and citizens safe and looks forward to continuing its active participation.</p> <p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that their testing regime continues to adapt and evolve based on advice regarding best practice models from the World Health Organisation.</p> <p>The Government also supports the four indicators put forward in this recommendation as a means of measuring the ongoing development of their testing regime.</p> <p>The Department of Health has rigorous routines to examine performance metrics and inform operational adjustments. These routines are continually monitored and evaluated for optimisation purposes.</p> <p>Testing is undertaken subject to strict accreditation requirements from the National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia to ensure tests and results are accurately recorded.</p> <p>Test turnaround times are closely monitored and data collected, with a system target of at least 80 per cent of test results being returned in 24 hours (recognising that in some circumstances, such as where additional analyses are required, testing can sometimes take longer). The Government also works with health services and pathology providers to reduce turnaround times and improve system performance.</p> <p>To date, Rapid Response Testing Teams, Roving Testing Squads and Call-To-Test teams have been added to the state’s testing response to support Victoria’s extensive network of fixed, drive-through, walk-through, roving, mobile and pop-up testing sites.</p> <p>Rapid Community Engagement Teams (RCETs) were also established across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria to provide enhanced capability and surge capacity for rapid community engagement.</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<p>The Government will continue to improve its comprehensive testing regime using accessibility and ease of testing, accuracy and efficiency of results, surge workforce preparedness, and deployment of multiple testing strategies as progress indicators.</p>
<p>9. That the Victorian Government be guided by the following indicators in relation to the ongoing development of a contact tracing system so that Victorians can be confident that it is fit for purpose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitates multilingual communications through in-language resources • cost-effectiveness • technology captures nuances for each case and contact (number of persons per household, language, quarantine stage, time since test and more) • risk-based prioritisation during super surges • capacity to analyse data and identify links. 	<p>Continuously innovate</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government supports the ongoing development of its contact tracing system to ensure that it is fit for purpose to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>The Department of Health welcomes ongoing partnerships with Local Government, local schools, local community leaders, ethnic community radios, faith groups and youth networks to assist with translated materials and resources dedicated to CALD and priority communities.</p> <p>To further support community engagement and rapid contact tracing, the Department of Health and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, supported by the CALD Communities Taskforce have also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • translated COVID-19 communications materials into 57 languages • produced audio and video in-language content with community ambassadors • produced in-language animations using simple language and recorded in 18 languages • funded a daily broadcast multilingual news service in 22 languages • developed a cultural observances campaign strategy • provided monthly briefings to the multicultural sector on the latest COVID-19 information, supporting multicultural community leaders to address questions, misinformation and concerns in their communities • established a WhatsApp Community Leaders group • invested \$2.1m in local Partnerships to fund community champions to work across six most diverse local government areas and support the identification of emerging issues within communities

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided \$5.4 million in ongoing targeted funding for local CALD communities to directly support the ongoing pandemic response, promoting testing and COVIDSafe behaviours • proactively reach out to relevant CALD community leaders at the onset of outbreaks to engagement the community • bicultural workers and Rapid Response Community Engagement Teams (RRCETS) are deployed to fixed and pop up testing sites to provide information and support <p>The Victorian Government supports conducting ongoing analysis of the current digital contact tracing system to enhance our understanding of its capabilities and continuously improve its performance.</p> <p>The Victorian Government’s investment in its Digital Testing Program and ‘Test Tracker’ testing form also ensures adequate information is captured at the testing point to help inform its response. Some of the data collected includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • number of persons per household • preferred language spoken at home • days since first symptom onset <p>At a high level, indicators such as those highlighted in this recommendation are used to better inform our response to outbreaks ensuring we are targeting the right cohorts and effectively catering our messaging and testing response to what the data is showing us.</p> <p>Using the CALD Urgent Response Brokerage Fund, we are soon to offer formal Emergency Management training to CALD community leaders to enable more seamless collaboration between the Department of Health and CALD communities and during an outbreak. Additionally, the Department funds grassroots community organisations to work collaboratively with our COVID response teams during an outbreak – supporting the delivery of translated and targeted communications delivered face to face and through social media.</p> <p>The Family Recovery Program, also supported by the CALD Urgent Response Brokerage Fund, provides longer term support to families and</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<p>households who are impacted by COVID-19. Recovery options may include training, housing, childcare, health care and mental health supports.</p> <p>The Government looks forward to continued collaboration with its partners to support ongoing development of its contact tracing system.</p>
<p>10. That the Victorian Government conduct modelling studies on its digital contact tracing system to better understand its expected and potential capacity. The results of these studies should be made public</p>	<p>Modernise systems</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government recognises the need for a robust contact tracing system to control the spread of COVID-19. All modelling to date is based on being able to quickly identify and isolate cases and contacts. The Government also understands the importance of a well-trained and well-equipped workforce to both collect, analyse and use data to inform systems improvement.</p> <p>Following the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Health (the Department) embarked upon end-to-end enhancements to the technologies that underpin efficient and effective contact tracing.</p> <p>These enhancements included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test Tracker (testing data collection) • Improvement to the Public Health Event Surveillance System (PHESS) • Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) (Salesforce) platform • Victorian Government QR Code Service (digital visitor registration) <p>Through these improvements the Government has been able to firmly establish and monitor key performance indicators of the system such as turnaround times for tests (percentage who have received their test results within 24 hours), the number of cases who are isolating at the time of their symptoms, and the percentage of close contacts of cases who are identified and told to isolate within 48 hours of being identified. These and other key metrics enable the Government to understand the performance of the digital tracing system and ensure that it is performing at a level</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<p>required to effectively manage any and all cases and outbreaks should they occur.</p> <p>The Department is also undertaking modelling and analysis to identify thresholds for further expanding the contact tracing and outbreak management system. This will align with COVID-19 modelling and identify staffing and system needs above the currently available surge capacity, as well as capacity gained through the newly established abilities of the LPHUs to use the digital contact tracing system and participate in contact tracing and case management.</p> <p>The Government is continuing to conduct additional workforce development, research and modelling on its digital contact tracing system to facilitate rapid and effective contact tracing. The Government will endeavour to provide more publicly available information on the impact of effective contact tracing on our ability to contain the spread of COVID-19.</p>
<p>11. That the Victorian Government establish a trained reserve workforce for future public health emergencies</p>	<p>Localising public health network</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government supports the establishment of a trained reserve workforce for future public health emergencies as part of a whole-of-Victorian-Government response.</p> <p>The development of LPHUs has seen a considerable number of workers gain experience in contact tracing during the second wave of COVID-19 in Victoria. As the COVID-19 emergency recedes, further workforce planning will be required to ensure the surge workforce is appropriately and effectively resourced moving forward.</p> <p>Arrangements have also been established across other government agencies, external providers and health specialists to provide a surge workforce in the event of future waves of COVID-19 transmission.</p> <p>LPHUs deliver contact tracing closer to relevant communities and provide a surge workforce, appropriately resourced based on further workforce planning, ready and able to manage any increase in infections. LPHUs</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<p>operate as a network to ensure their deployment can be targeted to areas in need. The LPHUs therefore play a pivotal role in prevention strategies.</p> <p>The Victorian Government will continue to support and embed LPHUs in local communities, working jointly with health services.</p>
<p>12. That the Victorian Government increase the number of staff in the Department of Health and Human Service’s public health units and contact tracing teams so that it is in line with current recommendations</p>	<p>Localising public health network</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government supports the need for scalability, increasing the number of staff working in the Department of Health’s PHUs and contact tracing teams to improve the capacity and effectiveness of its contact tracing system.</p> <p>As identified in Recommendation 1, the Victorian Government has established a network of LPHUs in regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne.</p> <p>Since delivery of the Inquiry’s report, the Victorian Government has increased the number of staff in LPHUs. T</p>
<p>13. That the Victorian Government publish accurate records of financial commitments and costings involved with the testing regime and contact tracing system, including resourcing and staffing by third parties.</p>	<p>Accountability for decisions</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in principle.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government supports publishing accurate records to maintain transparency and trust with the community.</p> <p>There are multiple processes which allow for financial scrutiny – e.g. PAEC.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Department of Health (the Department) has systems in place to report on structures and workforce.</p> <p>The Department is undertaking work to further workforce reporting systems, including other supporting features such as backend database reconfiguration, whole of department employee lifecycle process and data capture points, and a governance model that will ensure the improved processes and systems remain in place.</p>
<p>14. That the Victorian Government engage in further consultation with other</p>	<p>Engagement with partners</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
<p>jurisdictions to ensure consistency of testing criteria</p>		<p>The Victorian Government welcomes further engagement, consultation and collaboration with other jurisdictions to ensure testing criteria is consistent across the board. The Victorian Government also welcomes inter-jurisdictional information sharing and collaboration more broadly around testing strategies and approaches. Victoria also notes that within a nationally consistent approach there is a need for dynamic strategies that enable jurisdictions to effectively respond to the local pandemic context of a jurisdiction at a point in time.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government has developed the Series of National Guidelines (SoNGs) in consultation with the Communicable Diseases Network Australia, which has been endorsed by the Australian Health Protection Principle Committee. The Communicable Diseases Network Australia has Victorian representation and is engaged in this work to develop national recommendations. Victoria subsequently follow the recommendations. The SoNGs summarise recommendations for surveillance, infection control, laboratory testing and contact management for COVID-19.</p> <p>The Victorian Government has also seen considerable improvements to testing processes and coordination through interjurisdictional collaboration. This includes improved geocoding of locations to enable daily reporting of cases notified to Public Health that are of relevance elsewhere in the Government, such as public housing. The Government highlights the contributions made by Victoria to inter-jurisdictional collaboration on the development and introduction of new testing approaches for hotel quarantine workers and for international airline crew.</p> <p>In response to the findings about pathology system capacity, Victoria also notes that significant investment by the state of Victoria and pathology laboratory partners to expand capacity, strengthen surge capability, and reduce turnaround times to respond to the demand for testing due to the magnitude of Victoria’s second wave. Victoria’s public pathology testing capacity is now more than triple what it was in October 2020. These initiatives are further detailed in other areas of the parliamentary inquiry response.</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<p>Victoria has also welcomed the support and collaboration with the Commonwealth in its ongoing work to build a greater capacity and fitness for purpose response to manage COVID-19.</p>
<p>15. That the Victorian Government mandate the use of Test Tracker for all test sites and develop real-time reporting between Test Tracker and the appropriate databases</p>	<p>Modernise systems</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in principle</u></p> <p>The Government supports implementing Test Tracker with as many testing sites and pathology laboratories as technically and clinically feasible.</p> <p>However, the Government needs to consult industry bodies, including health services and pathology providers, on where it can be implemented and adopted. Health services and pathology providers utilise a complex set of embedded information systems, including legacy systems, and in some circumstances integration with Test Tracker may not be technically feasible. In these circumstances, the Government is investigating other information solutions that can reduce manual handling and support real time reporting.</p> <p>Test Tracker has processed close to over 740,000 tests with around 8,000 – 10,000 tests being processed each day. Approximately 50 per cent of the testing network is covered with the use of Test Tracker, including most of the Hotel Quarantine Staff testing. The Government will continue to roll out its use over the coming month, further improving the quality of testing data.</p>
<p>16. That the Victorian Government provide evidence to the Victorian public about the basis of its contact tracing and testing response to COVID-19 in relation to operational processes implemented and procurement decisions</p>	<p>Accountability for decisions</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government is supportive of transparent ways of operating and the importance of communicating the evidence behind its decision-making. It also understands that this also supports public cooperation and compliance.</p> <p>The Victorian Government Purchasing Board (VGPB's) Governance Policy requires that departments publish a summary of procurement activities planned to be conducted over the forthcoming 12-18 months.</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<p>The Department of Health's operational processes are detailed in the policy and guidelines, directives and Procurement Activity Plan, which can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services website.</p>
<p>17. That the Victorian Government, through the Chief Medical Officer embed general practitioners into the system of management of contact tracing and testing as part of a localised, collaborative and more person-centred approach</p>	<p>Engagement with partners</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in principle.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government welcomes engaging with General Practitioners (GPs) and Public Health Nurses (PHNs) to determine the roles that GPs are best placed to fulfil in the COVID response.</p> <p>The Government recognises that GPs are essential to case management and perform a critical role in the public health response. They are the key clinical care providers for COVID-19 positive individuals through the COVID positive pathways program. The program ensures that COVID positive individuals are connected to their usual GP or connected with a new GP with assistance from the local Victorian Primary Health Network to receive home-based care, supported by telehealth and remote monitoring. In addition to clinical care, individuals are provided with access to a range of social and welfare supports to ensure that they can safely isolate at home.</p> <p>GPs are already a vital component of the Government's contact tracing and testing system's hierarchy and management structure. GPs are involved with LPHUs including local community and primary care engagement in COVID-19 case management, contact tracing and outbreak management.</p> <p>The Department of Health has actively engaged with GPs, the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and PHNs to support them in managing patients with COVID-19 or suspected COVID-19.</p> <p>An outcome of this engagement is an overarching COVID-19 GP model of care that was developed to support GPs and provide information to assist with patient referral to appropriate services. The model of care is published on the Department of Health's website.</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<p>The Government will continue to work in close consultation with GPs to formalise their role in testing, case management and the vaccination strategy.</p>
<p>18. That the Victorian Government’s CALD Community Task Force include health workers such as General Practitioners</p>	<p>Engagement with partners</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in principle.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government supports the inclusion of health workers in the Victorian Government response to the COVID-19 pandemic and welcomes the opportunity to work closely with CALD communities.</p> <p>The Victorian Government has established a CALD Health Advisory Panel which includes GPs and members of the CALD Communities Taskforce (government department representatives). The Taskforce works closely in partnership with the CALD Health Advisory Panel. The CALD Health Advisory Panel provides monthly updates directly to the CALD Communities Taskforce, to ensure that the views and expertise of CALD health workers are embedded within the work of the CALD Communities Taskforce.</p> <p>Collaboration continues with Primary Health Networks, including GPs, to work with general practice to improve testing participation, particularly in priority local government areas.</p> <p>The Government will continue to work closely with the CALD Health Advisory Panel to ensure their testing regime and contact tracing system is effective for all Victorians.</p>
<p>19. That the Victorian Government work with unions, industry groups and associations to develop clear and accessible guidance for businesses on their obligations for contact tracing record keeping, particularly around setting up and using digital systems such as QR codes. Involve communication experts early and throughout</p>	<p>Engagement with partners</p>	<p><u>Victoria supports this recommendation in full.</u></p> <p>The Victorian Government recognises that strong engagement with unions, industry groups and associations to create clear and accessible guidance for businesses is essential for an effective and efficient Victorian COVID-19 contract tracing system and testing regime.</p> <p>The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) has established the Industry Coordination and Recovery Group to work closely with</p>

Recommendation	Theme	Proposed Victorian Government position and actions
		<p>unions, industry groups and associations to provide high quality guidance to businesses on COVIDSafe operations, including how to establish record keeping systems that support contract tracing.</p> <p>The Group engages with unions, industry groups and associations across a variety of channels, gathering intelligence and providing advice to Department of Health (DH) public health teams on industry impacts. It also supports unions, industry groups and associations to understand public health directions, helping businesses to implement and comply with COVIDSafe requirements.</p> <p>The Industry and Coordination and Recovery has partnered with DJPR's Strategic Communications and Marketing branch to develop clear and concise guidance to industry. The team provides advice on how to effectively communicate COVIDSafe requirements and restriction changes to businesses, supporting business owners and operators to inform and educate their workers and customers on COVIDSafety.</p> <p>From 28 May, all venues and businesses required to undertake electronic record keeping must use the Victorian Government QR Code Service through the Service Victoria app. This is convenient for Victorians and gives contact tracers access to the best data quickly.</p> <p>The Government will continue to engage with relevant stakeholders to ensure any future obligations on businesses and industry are clearly communicated.</p>